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JOINT PROGRAM PLANS TO RETURN SOCKEYE SALMON TO COQUITLAM LAKE RESERVOIR

COQUITLAM: After an absence of nearly 100 years, sockeye salmon returned to the Coquitlam River in 2007. This follows the establishment of a program in 2003 to assess the feasibility of restoring sockeye above the dam. While there are still questions to be answered before a full-scale run can be re-established, work to address these is well underway. The return witnessed in 2007 has resulted in a renewed commitment among interested parties to re-establish Coquitlam sockeye.

Water quality protection is a critical consideration in the overall feasibility analysis, and Metro Vancouver and Kwikwetlem First Nation will be conducting a three-year study of lake ecology and potential water quality impacts of returning sockeye.

"We share the Kwikwetlem people's commitment to a return of sockeye to those waters," said Mayor Ralph Drew, a member of the Metro Vancouver Board of Directors and the designated Board liaison to the Kwikwetlem First Nation. "All parties have agreed to spend the next three years carefully monitoring the ecology of the lake just to be sure there is no impact on drinking water quality."

Metro Vancouver's Water Commissioner, Johnny Carline, commented: "We are very optimistic about the success of this project. Considerable scientific work has already been done, and the joint monitoring program is designed to ensure that the re-introduction of sockeye salmon into Coquitlam Lake will be compatible with Metro Vancouver's objective of absolutely safe, good quality, drinking water."

"*Kwikwetlem* means red fish up the river," said Kwikwetlem First Nation Councillor George Chaffee.

"Our community is committed to a return of the sockeye. It is very meaningful to us, historically and culturally," added Kwikwetlem Fisheries Resource Manager Glen Joe.

The water quality study has the full support of the Kwikwetlem Salmon Restoration Program Committee; a multi-stakeholder Consultative Committee initiated in 2003 by BC Hydro to determine the scientific feasibility of returning sockeye salmon above the dam. This Committee has also been addressing other issues related to the sockeye's return. To date the Coquitlam watershed feasibility studies have been funded by the BC Hydro Bridge Coastal Restoration Program, which funds projects to restore fish and wildlife populations and habitat in the coastal region impacted by Hydro's generating facilities. Membership on the committee includes: Metro Vancouver, Kwikwetlem First Nation, BC Hydro, Fisheries and Oceans Canada, BC's Ministry of Environment, Cities of Coquitlam and Port Coquitlam, and environmental groups, including Watershed Watch Salmon Society, North Fraser Salmon Assistance Program and the Maple Creek Streamkeepers.

This joint approach demonstrates the interests of all parties towards ensuring the conservation of salmon species, restoration of a culturally important fish, maintenance of clean, safe drinking water, as well as maintaining the reservoir's function as part of a hydro-electric system.

BC Hydro Senior Vice President, Chris O'Riley commented: "We are very pleased that sockeye salmon returned. There are still many questions to be answered, but this is a major achievement and milestone and we are very pleased to be involved with all our partners in this program."

In 1914, Coquitlam Lake was enlarged by the construction of a dam on the Coquitlam River. Today, the reservoir is jointly managed by BC Hydro and Metro Vancouver. It is one of three protected sources of drinking water for Metro Vancouver's 2.3 million residents, stores water for the generation of hydro-electricity and lies within the traditional territory of the Kwikwetlem First Nation.

The dam created an obstruction for salmon to return to their spawning and rearing habitat in the Coquitlam Watershed. Prior to 1914, sockeye salmon were indigenous to Coquitlam Lake and a component of the historic food fishery for the Kwikwetlem First Nation.

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